FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

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The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is to encourage and support a spiritual orientation to life, to promote the practice of prayer, meditation, and service to others, and to help bring about a deeper spirit of unity among humankind.

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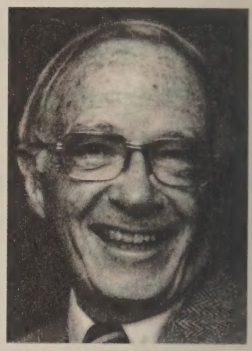
Cover photograph by Cliff Moore.



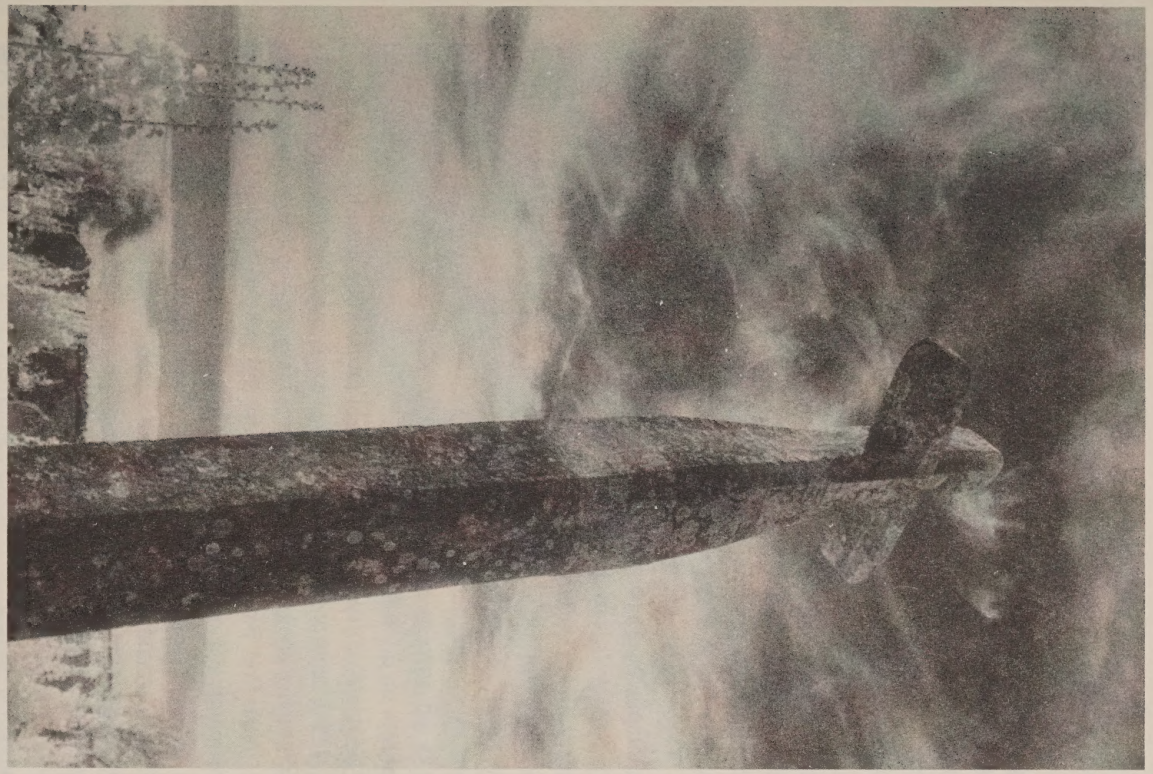
The holy season of Easter throbs with the possibility, the miracle, of coming alive again. After the dead of winter all of nature sings and hums and pops with the joy of new birth. The English Hawthorn trees that line Witherspoon Street here in Princeton, where we have our office, are alive with birds chattering in the branches that will soon give birth to soft pink and white blossoms that even now are gently spiraling upward into the soft air of spring.

For those of us who have been hibernating too long in the joyless caves of our obsession with getting and protecting the goods and goodies of this world for ourselves, the joyful sights and sounds of Easter reawaken us to our true self, to the loving heart that wants happiness and joy for all living beings; to the divinity within us that is crucified again and again by the demands of the ego but that arises again and again when the heart says "Yes!" before the mind has a chance to say "No." All of us have unceasing opportunities to say that "Yes!" to life, to come alive again, but too often we look the other way--unlike the construction worker in New York who was severely injured recently when he ran in front of a falling crane to push aside and save the lives of two children who would otherwise have been crushed to death. That of the living Christ in him, the force that flung his body in front of the falling crane that the children might live, is also pulsing deep in the heart of every one of us, however entombed that selfless love might be.

Yes, flawed as we are, we are all spiritual beings on the path to completion, and Easter reminds us once again that every time we treat someone in trouble or need as if they were our only child, our beloved son or daughter, we rise again into the kingdom of radiant, all-encompasing love.

Paul Walsh

Paul Walsh



Janet Kerr

As I strolled through the restored Shaker Village near Lexington, Kentucky I marveled at how everything from architecture to decor pointed to the deeply held commitments of this early American utopian religious community. Order, usefulness, and simplicity were built into the fabric of daily life in Pleasant Hill. In the kitchens and in the bedrooms peg boards lined the walls overhead. In the evenings, all chairs, pots, pans, were hung up so that floors could be fully swept. In sleeping areas bonnets, wide-brimmed hats, and cloaks were placed neatly and at an easy reach.

There in Shakertown, the lack of clutter contrasted with my life. The simplicity of open spaces and fewer material goods opened time--to think, to walk, to be. Back in my real life the daily stacks of advertisements to buy things I don't need, piles of kids' artwork, and notices for conferences I am too busy to attend, recycling to sort and put by the curb on just the right day, spill out of the many baskets and bins meant to organize this mess. And when I reach my desk, to do lists and stacks of correspondence await. I turn on my computer and find messages on my e-mail, a fax begins whirring through the printer, and my electronic calendar reminds me of an overdue deadline.

Life a century "ahead" of the Shakers is overwhelming. Yet joining an alternative society, like the Shakers, is not an option for most of us. We must find new ways to live in this world, with its barrage of information and options--ways that spring from our core beliefs.

In our feature interview, Imam Chebli tells us that Muslims order their days around five daily prayers because, "Between every prayer you may forget God for awhile, but then you go back to the prayers and remember God." Elizabeth M. Racicot, once an avowed athiest, finds herself "surprised by grace" during her cousin's ordination service. Brother Victor-Antoine D'Avila-Latourrette offers ageless tidbits on how to join in nature's cycle of life through gardening, and Patricia Justine Fazzone reflects on how her beloved grandfather taught her to love

Janet Gnall

nature, and by so doing, to love God. During a panic attack, Rochelle Roelofs practices the "technique of focused attention." Joseph F. Schmidt and Sister Selena celebrate the "Little Way" of Therese of Lisieux during this, the centenary year after her death in 1897. Elizabeth Maloney finds a place to belong in the diversity of her local parish.

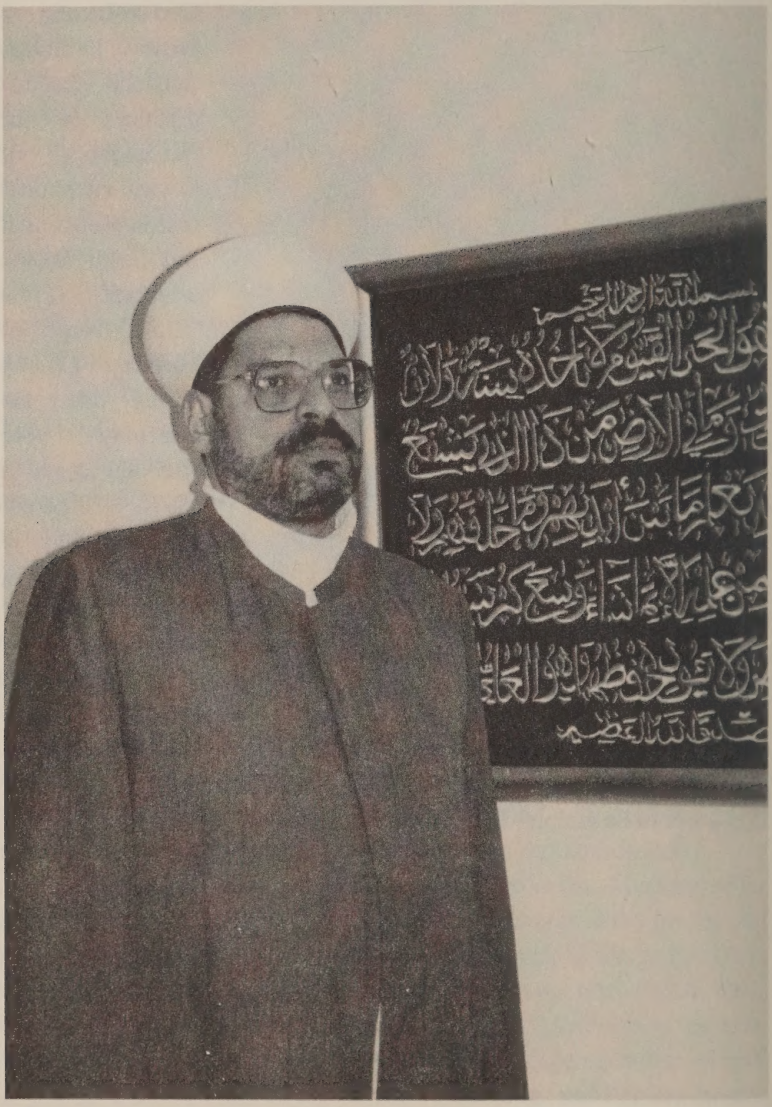
As for me, I'm relying on an old Shaker principle: simplify by saying no to "muchness." Simplicity doesn't subtract from my life; it adds. The old Shaker tune rings true: 'Tis a gift to be simple, tis a gift to be free.'

Blessings,

Rebecca Laird

Rebecca Laird

An Interview with Imam Hamad Ahmad Chebli



Prayer: Building Your Relationship with God

An Interview with Hamad Ahmad Chebli

On the day preceding Ramadan, the month of fasting, observed by Muslims worldwide, I talked with Imam Hamad Ahmad Chebli at the Islamic Society of Central Jersey. The Society's five hundred active families represent various Islamic sects from many nations including Lebanon, Egypt, India, Pakistan, Syria, and Bosnia. The Society operates a full-time private school for children from kindergarten to fourth grade, and a weekend health clinic is open to members of the broader community.

I found Imam Chebli, a man of imposing stature, to be approachable, forthright, and engaging. As Imam, he conducts daily prayers, interprets the Qur'an--Islam's holy scriptures, arbitrates disputes about Islamic law, teaches Islamic culture, and performs religious ceremonies--matrimonial introductions, weddings, and newborn baby services. He holds an M.A. in Islamic Canonical law from the al-Azhar University in Cairo.

When I peeked my covered head into the mosque's office to signal my arrival, a royally-robed Imam from Egypt awaited Imam Chebli's attention. With a warm smile Imam Chebli ushered me into the well-stocked library. As I waited, a picture of Mecca propped against the window caught my attention; the inscription on the photo read: "Prayer is when you talk to Allah; Meditation is when you listen to Allah."

How would you define prayer?

Going back to the prophet Adam and his wife, Eve, they committed sins and they prayed to God to ask him to forgive them. At the time of the prophet Abraham, he and his son Ishmael built the house of Mecca, and they conducted their own prayers during the building of the house.

For our readers in the Princeton area Imam Chebli can be heard on radio station WING, 1300 AM nightly from 7:05-7:35 pm. Those interested in visiting the Mosque may call (908)329-8126 for further information.

This prayer is recorded in the Qur'an. 'O God, accept our service. O God, make us among the people who submit their wills to you from this generation and the generations to come.' And we must not skip the prophets Moses or Jesus who prayed. Coming to the time of the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, there was a journey between Mecca and Jerusalem and to heaven. That journey we call a miracle. In that night, God prescribed Islamic prayer through the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, to conduct five times of prayer during day and night.

So what is the definition of prayer? For us as Muslims prayer is to build your relationship as a human being with God. Not only are you to build your relationship with God on Friday, Saturday, or Sundays according to the traditional ways. For on Fridays Muslims come to the mosque, on Saturdays Jews go to the synagogue, on Sundays Christians go to church. But daily prayers help us to have a strong relationship through obedience to God. Prayer helps us not to cross the borders or limits of God's dos and don'ts. As long as I am putting myself within the limits to do and to avoid what God told me not to do, I would consider that as both physical and spiritual prayer.

Can you describe the Five Pillars of Islam, the works of worship and service that are a part of the regular spiritual practices for Muslims?

(To help put this question in context, Imam Chebli described the rites performed during the intention to marry: couples affirm the goal of having children, giving them proper Islamic names, and raising them as Muslims; during pregnancy the mother and father abstain from non-Islamic foods, smoking and drinking alcohol; and at birth the first words spoken in the right ear of the child affirm his or her identity as a Muslim.)

From day one we want the child to know and to feel the Islamic way to live his or her life. On the seventh day of life the child must be given a beautiful name. As a Muslim, the best name you can give your child is to put the name of servant before the name of God. We have ninety-nine beautiful names for God: most merciful, most gracious, master of

the day of judgement . . . We can take any name from the list of attributes and put the name of the child with it. So when the child grows up, he or she knows by their name that, 'Yes I belong to God.' A name is something good you carry with you. No one can take it from you like a social security card. It is an identity for the child.

Also on the seventh day the parents invite their neighbors, the villagers, to celebrate the coming of the child. Here Islam is taking care of the rich and the poor. The prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, stated in one of his sayings, 'The worst dinner you have in your life will be when you invite rich people but don't invite the poor.' Here in this mosque, if someone wants to have a dinner they have no right to say they don't want someone to come who doesn't have a suit, a nice tie, or special dress. Why? What about the poor and homeless? We have people walking on Route 1 just outside our doors. We can invite that person to share our dinner in celebration of this child that was just born.

Between the ages of five and seven is the time of education. The prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said, 'Teach this child some basic detail about the prayers. Let the child understand the relationship between him and God as the Creator. Start to teach him the kind of cleanness, both outside and inside.' No prayer, according to the Islamic way, will be conducted if the physical body or the floor or the direction to Mecca is unclean. We wash our hands at least three times in the early morning when we wake up, we wash our mouth at least three times, we have to clean our noses five, six times, especially when we have the flu. We have to wash our faces to look very beautiful to God when we pray.

After the child learns these habits, at about the age of seven, the daily prayers become obligatory. They wake up and do the first prayer. This prayer will be repeated at noontime. Sometimes I am asked why we don't combine all of those prayers into one shot. People say, 'We are busy;' the parents are working sixteen hours a day. God said in the Qur'an, 'I make the prayers obligatory on you just to leave space in each one of those five prayers.' Why? Because sometimes as human beings we make mistakes. We hurt people by our tongues, by our hands, by cheating. Between every prayer you may forget God for awhile, but then you go back to the prayer and remember God again.

There are five prayers in Islam: morning, noon, afternoon, sunset, and before we go to sleep. Must we run to the mosque to say those prayers? No. We can pray at home, we can pray in our offices, we can pray it in the streets if we are traveling. There is no certain place we must pray or our prayers will not be accepted. Maybe with one exception. For Friday prayers we need a congregation, more than three people. The other prayers we can do as individuals.

So, what happens if a person must go on a business trip on a Friday and will be away from family and mosque?

His Friday prayers will not be obligatory on him under two conditions: if he is sick or if he will be traveling. Tomorrow begins Ramadan. I know many people who will be away on business going here and there. Islam tells them under these circumstances, don't fast. After you go home and you relax and rest with your family, then you make up another few days of fasting. If you are able to fast it will be better if you do, but it is not obligatory under these certain circumstances. And these same circumstances apply to the Friday prayers.

Let me give you another circumstance. If someone is walking down 5th Avenue in New York City when it is time to pray, what are they to do?

There are two options. Nowadays we may be living in a time in America where the future is going to be better for Muslims. There is a mosque on every corner, in every place, if you go and search for it. For example, in New York City there are 800,000 Muslims. On every corner there is a place to pray. It won't be a big church or synagogue, but a store or office is okay, too. I can do my prayers in a park, under a tree, on a corner of the street if the owner of that corner will allow me to. If I don't have those options, when I arrive at my office or to my house, after I eat my dinner or take a shower and relax a little bit, then I will make up the prayer I missed.

Let's go back to the Five Pillars of Islam.

The first pillar of Islam is to testify or to declare a very short statement. The meaning of the statement is: I bear witness that there is no god except God.

Why is it important for Muslims to make this declaration in a negative way? Before Muhammad, in the previous way of life, people ran away a little bit from the teaching of God. They tried to tell people that 'God has a son, God has a daughter, the female of the angels, God has a family, God was born as a human person.' For Muslims these teachings have no place in the Qur'an.

In the Qur'an, God said that he is the only God, that he created all human beings. In Islam we have no right as Muslims to bring God down from heaven to say, 'You are similar to the human being.' We are to raise the human being, male or female, to make him or her similar to God. That is why we say: "There is no god except Allah." Allah is not similar to the other false gods.

The second part of the command is to say: "I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God." You take this statement and compare it respectfully with what my brothers and sisters say in the church, those who believe in the trinity: I believe in God, the Father, the Holy Son, and the Holy Spirit. There are three things that are to become into one; especially the teachings about the prophet Jesus, peace be upon him. In Islam, in the Qur'an, Jesus has a complete chapter about him under his mother's name, Mary. None of the verses in the Qur'an say that Jesus is the son of God. But there is a very close statement that says: 'Jesus is the word of God.' That's why Muhammad, peace be upon him, was careful to say, 'I am a messenger. I am not the son, I am not the partner, I am not the controller, I am not the one who sends the rain. I am a human being similar to you. But the only difference between you and me is that I have the revelation, and that is the Qur'an.'

The first pillar of Islam is to say: "I bear witness that there is no other god except Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of God."

The second pillar of Islam is to pray--to have a good relationship between us and God.

The third pillar of Islam you find also in Christianity and Judaism, and we call it giving. We have to give. Here in our mosque I say, 'Please be careful when you hear your Imam speak about giving. Don't put your hand on your pocket.' There are many things we can give: our time, our knowledge. We can smile before the face of another. This is a charity. It does not just mean money, money, money. We all have something to give. To give is to purify yourself before God.

The fourth pillar of Islam is fasting. For one month of the year, we fast (from dawn to sunset), not to lose five pounds or to be athletic. To obey what God said in the Qur'an, you have to abstain from eating, drinking, sexual intercourse in marriage, lying, cheating. You close your eyes and don't look at all those programs on the television or on cable. You live your life only to please your God. For the people who say: 'I am fasting, I will not eat or drink, but I am going to that street where I am going to kiss that lady and invite her to my house.' What kind of fasting are you doing? Fasting is to stay away from all those things God says to stay away from.

The last pillar of Islam is to perform a Hajj, a journey to Mecca to visit the house of God, to be united with five million Muslims who travel there each year from all around the world. They go there to show unity. They pray behind one Imam; they pray to the same direction; they have to dress in the same kind of uniform. When you see five million Muslims with two pieces of sheet--one to cover their chest and one to cover their privacy; no gold, no silver--you see a very simple way of life.

These are the five pillars of Islam. This is not all of Islam, for there are many other things, but this is the way the person relates to God in daily life.

Are there voluntary prayers, prayers for the sick or for healing in Islam?

Yes. The daily prayers that we've talked about are obligatory. But there are two more festival prayers, one for the end of Ramadan, and

one for the time of pilgrimage. There are some prayers of supplication. If I am sick and have a headache, I can take my right hand, put it on my head, and pray: 'O God, I can take any kind of medication, but I am praying to you to heal my headache.' This can happen. We visit sick people in the hospital. In Islam there is no holy man, no priesthood nor rabbinate, for people to say: 'I will go to that certain person and then I will be okay.' There is no difference between my relationship to God, as the spiritual leader, and the relationship to God of any other member of the society. They can do the same as I can do. They do not come to the Imam to ask me to forgive them. We can offer supplication but there are no guarantees. My answer can be accepted or rejected. Nobody can be between the individual and God. So, yes, there are voluntary prayers.

When you go to visit someone do you offer written or formal prayers or do you offer spontaneous prayers of what is in your heart?

We leave it to the individual, to the sick person, and to the brother or sister who visits. If their hearts are full of love and respect and they are honest with God, any word they utter with their tongues God will accept. But there is a textbook for all of those prayers that are taken from the mouth of the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Because he was a human being, he got sick, he prayed to Allah, and the people around him, his companions, recorded those prayers by memorizing or writing them down. People can get that book and read them. But we like the prayers to come from the heart with full honesty and respect.

Much of Christian prayer, at least the Protestant variety, is done quietly or with a bowed head. But my understanding is that Muslim prayer requires more physical expression in prayer. Why is it important to bow and bend?

In a church or synagogue you have pews, here we give the elderly the chairs and they can pray from there. Why don't we have pews like for a mass? Why do we have our people sitting on the floor? Because we have a statement from the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. He said the time you will be closest to your God is when you bow down. Many people prefer to be shut in their heads and not to bow down to any human being, not to the king, not to the slave master, not to any authority.

It is not easy to tell a person to bow down. In Islam when you bow down you put your forehead, nose, hands, knees, and feet on the floor to say: 'God, I am your lamb, I am your servant. I am not to be proud to challenge you face to face.' You do the same sometimes in the church and in the synagogue. I sometimes visit there and see it.

We close our eyes when we bow down on the floor. I cannot bow down with my eyes open. The carpet dust will get in my eyes! We close our eyes to get to the shape of God. To see with my eyes, I see idols. I ask, did he die on the cross? Is he white, is he black? I cannot imagine the shape of God. When I close my eyes I can get the feeling in my heart--yes, there is the shape of God in my heart. It is not similar to anything I can imagine.

We start our prayers as Muslims with the words: "God is great." We end our prayers by saying: "Peace be upon you." We enter the prayer affirming that God is great, not we. We end our prayer with peace. I listen to the priests and rabbis and there are similarities.

I once knew a man who sang in the Methodist church choir and, by his own claim, was also a Muslim. Can one have a self-identity as a Muslim and participate in the Christian church?

Let me share my experience. Here in South Brunswick, we have a ministerial association; and the priests, rabbis and Imams celebrate Thanksgiving together. This year I went to Princeton to speak in the chapel at a service for about 2,000 people. There I saw some Muslim females wearing their scarves. They sat and listened and later asked me, "Should the Imam speak here? What does Thanksgiving have to do

with Islam?" Half of the Qur'an is about thanking God for everything he has given to us.

What surprised me was when, later that same week, I went to a Presbyterian Church, and in the balcony I saw a Muslim lady. After we finished she came to me and said she saw my name in the paper and wondered if she would be a sinner if she came to the church. I said no, and she should read our prophets who speak of going into churches. Muslims can attend the church; they can listen. The only thing we have to be careful about is what is the faith of that denomination? Does the priest or minister believe in the trinity? A person cannot be a Muslim and say I believe in one God and also believe in the trinity. We can go to the church to learn, to listen, but not to believe or practice. You cannot be Muslim and Christian at the same time just as you cannot be black and white at the same time. There are different genes in the body. This is true about faith.

At Fellowship in Prayer we encourage people to be involved in acts of service. How is your mosque involved in service activities and what social issues are you most concerned with?

As Imam, my position is not only to be inside the mosque. With the help of God, I was appointed, along with two local mayors, to serve the community as a human rights commissioner. I am also on the board of the local United Way. I am involved in many activities to help people understand Islam and what our positions are. Every year in September we offer an open invitation to all our neighbors. We invite them for breakfast and ask: "What do you want us to do this year?" We have to improve our relationship with our neighbors. They stood up and said:'I liked this. I didn't like that. Do this. Don't do that.'

Three years ago, with the help of the township of South Brunswick, we opened a free clinic in our mosque every Saturday, not only for Muslims but anyone in need can come and get a flu shot or medication. Every week we have many kids from high schools or universities to come and observe the Friday prayers. I go to jails to talk to the inmates about Islam and to ask:"How can we help you?"

All of these things Islam makes obligatory upon us. If you don't participate in these things you are a good Muslim individually, but Islam is not a religion of individuals. It is a religion of societies, communities, and nations. Every Muslim must go outside and participate in these kinds of activities. They must participate in elections, work to fight drugs and childhood pregnancy. Maybe I am wrong, but personally, I consider all of those things part of my religion. If I don't participate then something is missing from my religion.

Is there anything you'd like to say to our readers about the misconceptions or difficulties Muslims face in this country?

First of all, I thank you for taking the time to see with your eyes. You will be the best messenger for us to report what you saw here, what you felt, what you found here in the mosque, how the people in the mosque welcomed you. That is the right message to be given on our behalf.

I would like say to your readers: Read your religion first because you cannot give the message unless you know who you are. Then read the other religions. If you have the chance to read about Islam, read with an open mind. Don't say you are going to read about Islam or meet a Muslim while you have in your subconscious that Muslims are terrorists, or Muslims are killers, or Muslims ride camels. No, we have our cars outside. Read Islam with an open mind and open heart. And when you come to a point that is complicated, like: Why does one man in Islam equal two women? Why do women pray behind the men? Why do Muslim women have to be fully covered? We can explain it to you. Don't take one issue in Islam and try to criticize the entire religion. If you go back to the time of Adam, prophet Abraham, prophet Isaac, prophets Ishmael, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, you will find that none of them criticized each other. We have a saying in Islam that we believe in all of the prophets. Why do some people only believe in their prophet and don't open their eyes and minds to read something about Islam? I would like to invite people who are in our local area to visit us and those who are all over the world, go to the mosques and Islamic centers. Talk

to the people. Don't be afraid to talk to a Muslim. God forbid that you should die with this kind of hate. This hate will go with you to your grave. Please, before we pass away, let us know each other more and more. And one final statement: Let us talk to one another instead of talking about each other.

We often receive prayer requests. Can we pray for you?

Please pray for us, the Islamic Center of Central Jersey, and we will pray for your readers. We have to share this prayer because one verse in the Qur'an asks us to invite the People of the Book [Muslims, Jews, and Christians] to pray together to one God and not to look at each other as slaves to one another, but as the children of one Imam, one prophet; we call him the prophet Abraham. □

Prayer is religion in act; that is, prayer is real religion. It is prayer that distinguishes the religious phenomenon from such similar or neighboring phenomena as purely moral or aesthetic sentiment. Religion is nothing if it be not the vital act by which the entire mind seeks to save itself by clinging to the principle from which it draws its life. This act is prayer, by which term I understand no vain exercise of words, no mere repetition of certain sacred formulae, but the very movement itself of the soul, putting itself in a personal relation of contact with the mysterious power of which it feels the presence--it may be even before it has a name by which to call it. Wherever this interior prayer is lacking, there is no religion; wherever, on the other hand, this prayer rises and stirs the soul, even in the absence of forms or of doctrines, we have living religion.

William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience

O Loving Being! O Playful Creator! Love your way into the depths of my being today so that whatever I do will be a prayer, whether it be making bread or boiling water, visiting the sick or mowing the grass. . . . May it all be an act of love and a feast of leisure. In all that I do, may I remember that I am a tabernacle of the Holy Mystery, a place where you dwell. May my moments of quiet, listening at your feet lead me out again into the marketplace joyfully, gratefully, without complaining.

Macrina Wiederkehr, Song of the Seed

I pray for divine aid and divine things--for the help of the Divine Spirit to develop within me that understanding and wisdom which will direct me aright . . . While in the attitude of prayer I breathe in God's eternal love. The old idea of prayer was, that God could be dissuaded from doing evil unto his creatures, if they curried his favor. The new idea of prayer is that God helps those who help themselves, and that we must co-operate with the Divine Spirit, otherwise we may not receive the Divine blessing. Prayer should embody the will to act as occasions offer; our prayers must be in our lives.

Andrew Barrett, The Shaker Manifesto XIII

Surprised by Grace

ELIZABETH M. RACICOT

Dorothy Day spent her life working for justice, first as a communist, later as the founder of the first Catholic Worker House in New York City. This writer, on a similar pilgrimage, visits a long-lost cousin and discovers, much to her amazement, newfound faith.

I left the Catholic church in 1969 when I was 18 years old. I had become an atheist because, like Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, I was angry with organized religion and a god that I believed did nothing to stop the violence and racism and sexism that I had seen and experienced in New York City in the 1950s and 1960s.

As a teenager, I did volunteer work through the Catholic Church in Harlem and the South Bronx following the riots in the mid-60s. One day a young Puerto Rican friend pointed to a nine-year-old girl who was going into a tenement. "Do you know what's going to happen to her? She's going to get a shot of heroin. Now tell me what chance she's got to get out from under the poverty you see?" I could hear the hopelessness and anger in his voice and I had no answer. At that point, I could identify with Dorothy Day's feelings as a young woman:

Elizabeth M. Racicot lives with her husband in the Capital District area of upstate New York and is involved in ministry through St. Mary's Catholic Community in Crescent. She is both a freelance writer on spiritual issues and a technical writer in the computer industry.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek," but I could not be meek at the thought of injustice. I wanted a Lord who would scourge the money-changers out of the temple, and I wanted to help all those who raised their hand against oppression.

For me Christ no longer walked the streets of this world. He was two thousand years dead and new prophets had risen up in His place.

When I was a sophomore in college, I joined the Socialist Workers Party, which believed that only a Marxist revolution of workers and farmers could solve the problems of the poor around the world. They espoused an atheistic philosophy, which I readily embraced. I began traveling around the country as a political organizer.

> Something began to change inside of me that day. I became open to the possibility that I could again believe in God.

One evening, eight years later, while I was living in Louisville, Kentucky, my mother called to tell me that she was flying into town because my cousin Billy was taking his final vows to ordination at St. Meinrad's Benedictine monastery. I hadn't seen Billy since the 1960s when we were both teenagers. I didn't know that he was a Benedictine monk living not more than an hour's drive from me. No one had thought to tell me that Billy was at St. Meinrad's because, after all, I was a militant atheist who'd made it clear to my family that I wanted nothing to do with the Catholic Church.

Yet when I heard about Billy, I wanted to see him. We were close when we were young, and I couldn't quite believe he was a Benedictine monk. I was curious. I didn't want to go to a Catholic liturgy though, so I went to the party he threw for friends and family afterwards. Billy was glad to see me, so accepting and interested in me. He invited me to come back and visit him again. A few weeks later I returned. He

took me on a tour of the grounds, and invited me to the liturgy and to dinner with the monks. I went to Mass to be polite.

Grace is not always an obvious thing, but it is usually a wonderful thing. Here I was a Marxist at a Catholic mass. Every time I stood up and sat down, I cringed. My face was burning, and I just knew that every person in that church was looking at me and wondering what I was doing there. I left Mass thinking that I had done my duty to my cousin Billy and that was that. But something began to change inside of me that day. I became open to the possibility that I could again believe in God.

I went back to spend more time with Billy. He was non-judgmental of my avowed Marxism, but surprised at my ignorance of the history of peace and justice in the Catholic Church. He told me about Dorothy Day, who had been a communist and atheist before founding the Catholic Worker Movement in the 1930s; about the Berrigan brothers, two priests who had risked jail to protest the war in Vietnam in the 1960s; about Thomas Merton and Matthew Fox, Catholic writers and priests who had challenged many of the Church's views on peace and justice; and about Maryknoll, a religious order of priests, nuns, and lay people who work in the poorest, and sometimes the most violent, communities in Latin America, Africa, and the Far East. And he invited me to his ordination.

I went. I don't remember too much except for the part when the three men to be ordained lay flat on the ground for what seemed like a very long time, the beautiful chanting, and, when it was all over, that first blessing. I got in line because my aunt literally pushed me into place, insisting that I let my cousin give me his first blessing. I thought the whole thing silly, yet I wanted to do it. I was never the same after that, and I can't quite explain it except for grace.

> I began to pray--tentatively, at first, fearfully, but it was a start. I would say to God, "Just show me your face. Help me to believe in what I cannot see."

Worldly justice and unworldly justice are quite different things. The supernatural approach when understood is to turn the other cheek, to give up what one has, willingly, gladly, with no spirit of martyrdom, and to rejoice in being the least, to be unrecognized, the slighted. I was making no pretensions to being a Christian at the time, but I was professing to be a radical. But I was not a good one. I was following the 'devices and desires of my own heart.'

We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other. We know Him in the breaking of bread, and we know each other in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone any more. Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet, too, even with a crust, where there is companionship.

(Christ) died between two thieves because He would not be made an earthly King. He lived in an occupied country for thirty years without starting an underground movement or trying to get out from under a foreign power. His teaching transcended all the wisdom of the scribes and pharisees, and taught us the most effective means of living in this world while preparing for the next. And He directed His sublime words to the poorest of the poor, to the people who thronged the towns and followed after John the Baptist, who hung around, sick and poverty-stricken at the doors of rich men.

From The Long Loneliness *by Dorothy Day. Copyright 1952, Harper Row, Publishers, Inc.*

In the meantime, the rest of my life was starting to unravel. I was running for Governor of Kentucky on the Socialist Workers Party ticket at the time, and the Louisville branch had collected enough signatures to get my name on the ballot. The Socialist Workers Party had never been on the statewide ballot in Kentucky. When we handed in the petitions, we held a press conference and received lots of media attention, and I got asked lots of questions, many of which I didn't know how to answer, except to say that the problems of the world would be solved when the workers and farmers united in a Marxist revolution.

I was spouting a line I had been spouting for years but had stopped believing somewhere along the way and didn't realize it until that press conference. When I got home that evening, I knew that things would not be the same for me. I could not continue fighting for justice under the banner of Marxism.

Painfully, in 1979 I withdrew from the race for Governor of Kentucky. It was the single most difficult decision I have ever made. I let down hundreds of people who had worked long hours to get me on the ballot. They were angry, hurt, and confused by my withdrawal. But it was the right thing for me to do, and looking back on it, I see that it was the grace of God that gave me the courage to do it. Not long after, I quit the Socialist Workers Party.

I was about to begin the loneliest time of my life. The Socialist Workers Party had been my whole life. I walked away and had nothing to replace it.

I was confused, but I kept searching for answers and kept visiting my cousin. He had a hope and a joy in life that I did not have but I wanted. He kept encouraging me to search for God, and I did.

I asked a lot of questions, read a lot of spiritual books, and then I began to pray--tentatively, at first, fearfully, but it was a start. I would say to God, "Just show me your face. Help me to believe in what I cannot see." Gradually my heart softened, my faith deepened, and my prayers were answered. I began to see God's face in others and to believe in what I saw.

Then in August of 1982 I decided to visit with Billy while he was home on vacation. He bought me a copy of *The Long Loneliness*,

Dorothy Day's spiritual autobiography that describes her journey from communism to Catholicism. It answered many of the questions I'd been asking myself for the last four years--reading it changed my life. Three months later I re-converted to Catholicism. There I have found a sense of purpose and community that I had lost when I left the Socialist Workers Party. With a full and grateful heart, I reflect again on the wisdom of Dorothy Day's words in the postscript to *The Long Loneliness:*

> "We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community." □

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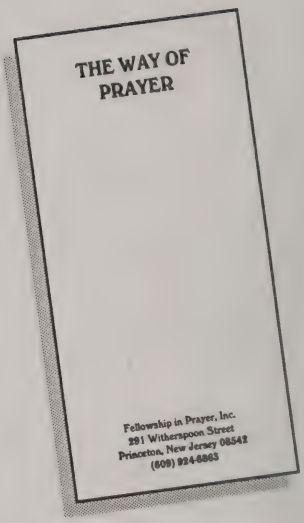

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What would you like to tell us about your spiritual needs, desires, experiences? About *Fellowship in Prayer*? Use the space below!

Tom Dunham

Spring Gardening

BROTHER VICTOR-ANTOINE D'AVILA-LATOURRETTE

A Benedictine monk traces the careful practice of gardening and admonishes the novice, "start slowly" and "let Mother Nature be our guide."

> Behind the abbey, and within the wall of the cloister, there is a wide level of ground; here there is an orchard, with a great many different fruit trees, quite like a small wood. It is close to the infirmary, and is very comforting to the monks, providing a wide promenade for those who want to walk, and a pleasant resting place for those who prefer to rest. Where the orchard leaves off, the garden begins divided into several beds, or still better cut up by little canals . . . The water fulfills the double purpose of nourishing the fish and watering the vegetables.
>
> *Anonymous French manuscript, twelfth century*

The Lord God then "took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). At the beginning of time, gardening is recognized as part of God's mandate to man to care for the Earth. The early monks in the Egyptian desert took to heart this Biblical command, becoming avid gardeners as well as watchful stewards of the land entrusted to them.

Brother Victor-Antoine D'Avila-Latourrette is a contemplative monk at Our Lady of the Resurrection and author of the acclaimed cookbook, From a Monastery Kitchen.
From A Monastic Year: Reflections From a Monastery, *copyright 1996 by Brother Victor-Antoine D'Avila-Latourrette. Reprinted with permission of Taylor Publishing Co., 1550 West Mockingbird Lane, Dallas, TX 75235.* A Monastic Year *is available through most bookstores or by calling 800-275-8188.*

The idea of the garden was dearly loved by them, for it also enabled them to recreate the paradise they had once shared with God. Those early monks went on to elaborate the principles of monastic gardening in the same way and at the same time that they elaborated the other principles of monastic life.

An early life of St. Anthony, written by his friend St. Hilarion describes Anthony's little garden: "These vines and these little trees did he plant; the pool did he contrive, with much labor for the watering of his garden; with his rake did he break up the earth for many years." St. Anthony cultivated his garden to provide food for himself and to share the rest with his neighbors, especially the poor, as the Gospel commands. Since gardening had such a prominent place in monasteries, it is not surprising that the two patron saints of gardening were monks, St. Phocas and St. Fiacre, who are always portrayed with their spade, shovel, or rake.

An early medieval manuscript that has survived into our own day shows a plan, drawn up for the Benedictine abbey of St. Gall in the ninth century, of an ideal monastery, with its dependencies and gardens. There we discover the cloister, with its traditional garden, the physician's herb garden near the infirmary, and the large garden to feed the monastic community. Attached to this large garden was the gardener's garden. The monks grew fruits and vegetables, flowers and vines, flavoring and healing herbs, and plants that provided dyes, inks, and incense for the monastery.

This long gardening tradition continues today; it is still a thoroughly monastic occupation. In early spring, as soon as the soil is workable and warm, I begin work in our enclave's gardens. Before the enjoyable task of planting, there is the yearly cleanup and raking of winter's debris. Then I plant the seeds for later harvest: lettuce, arugula, spinach, swiss chard, radishes, and peas are some of the very first. An early start expedites germination. And the sooner the plants begin to grow, the quicker they develop strong root systems, which collect the soil moisture and nutrients necessary to good health and excellent yields. Careful gardeners--and we try to be such, as monks--must be vigilant at this stage to ensure that seedlings are not killed by a late frost, which here

can occur as late as the middle of May. (Gardeners here do not set out tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, and cucumbers before the Memorial Day weekend.)

Gardening within a monastery is both a task and an art, and it's something we only gradually begin to fathom in the early years of our monastic life. The more experienced gardener-monks teach us to start slowly. They instruct us on how to improve our soil with compost and other amendments, knowing well that this will have a profound effect on the variety of plants we grow. I learned early, as well, to let Mother Nature be our guide. Her signals often indicate the propitious time for many garden chores. For instance, when the crocus is in bloom, we begin cleaning up winter's debris. When the forsythia begins to bloom, we prune the roses, evergreens, and plants that have been damaged by the winter. When the soil warms up, we begin to divide and transplant the perennials.

Spring gardening occupies a special place in the heart of the monk, for it usually coincides with Easter. Easter, of course, celebrates the Lord's resurrection, which is also the feast of our monastery. Spring gardening nurtures hope in the monk, then fulfills the promise of new life when all creation is renewed by the power of Christ's Resurrection.

Though a life of retreat offers various joys,
none, I think, will compare with the time one employs
in the study of herbs, or in striving to gain
some practical knowledge of nature's domain.
Get a garden! What kind you may get matters not.

Walafrid-Strabo, Hortulus, Latin manuscript, ninth century □

Gifts For a Child

PATRICIA JUSTINE FAZZONE

A grandfather teaches his young granddaughter that "creation's beauty" is our "daily bread." Years later that child now grown, retells this sacred story of love.

As a young child I loved to walk to the old well at St. Nicholas Ukrainian Cemetery in Cranesville, a village in upstate New York. My special part in visiting the cemetery was to pump fresh water from the well and carry it to my grandfather's grave, to water the flowers growing in front of the stone marker. My visit today brings me near images I have known for more than thirty years. I feel again the freshness of the water on my hands as it rushes forth and I remember. I walk to the grave past the white sculpted angel that used to comfort me in my childhood visits. Against the sunlight I see the fullness and the gracefulness of the angel marking the place where Pa's stone marker is set firmly in the earth.

I sit on the grass, feeling my body rest. The images of this place are sacred to me, as sacred as my childhood home in Cranesville, the village where Pa shared with me the gift of himself and the gift of the sacred that radiated throughout his life. A beekeeper and a blacksmith, my grandfather shared with me his sensitivity to beauty and to the mystery of God's presence in creation and in family rituals.

I feel the warmth of morning sunshine on my face. I feel my love for Pa, the grandfather I knew for the first four years of my life. I feel centered with love in the remembering of the brilliance of the sky over

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our home on a summer night. I remember our fascination with the moon as we sat on the steps of the porch. We listened to the sound of crickets and watched the flash of fireflies. And he was close to me touching me with the immensity of the universe but making creation intimate because we were together in the country place we called *home*. I still long for the intimacy of the sacred recognized and shared with a loved one, for the quiet rhythms of night set in stillness as we await the first light from stars that shine like beacons. "Who made the stars?" I asked Pa and he replied, "a wondrous God who loves light."

In the freshness of morning I loved to walk with Pa near the blossoming apple tree whose base was encircled with white and purple violets. They glistened in the morning dew. I can still see Pa bending low, resting his hands on the wet, fertile earth as he watches me discovering the touch of my hands as I receive the delicate beauty of the violets.

"Who made the stars?" I asked Pa and he replied, "A wondrous God who loves light."

I remember the blossoming of the sweet cherry tree that grew inside the flower garden enclosed by a white, wooden fence. The slender, graceful shape of the fruit tree with its wonderful green foliage I watched emerge into summer ripeness. I loved to hold big bunches of its sweet fruit in my hands. I delighted in hearing Pa tell me the story of the long journey the honey bees made to their hives where they worked to make new honey. On a sunny autumn day when the process was completed, Pa and I sat on the porch eating sweet honey from the comb.

Not far from the row of beehives was the artesian well, its waters bubbling and overflowing from fertile underground springs. I loved to cup my hands together to drink the cold water. Fresh water flowed into ditches whose fertile banks held raspberry bushes so tall and plentiful

Tom Dunham

that Pa would lift me up so that I could reach the ripest and biggest berries.

As he shared the plenitude of creation with me, my grandfather gifted my childhood with a loving, unconditional invitation to a connectedness with the creative power and presence of God. The unfolding of creation's beauty was my daily bread. Our touch with God's mystery of abundance was a sharing of moments that connected me to a sense of awe, mystery, and wonder embodied in day-to-day experiences. Prayer of praise, awe, and thanksgiving I learned through a tactile experience with profound processes and cycles of life incarnated in the seasonal unfolding of bud, blossom, and fruit. Intimacy with Pa on the land led me to a felt presence of the sacred, to an experience of the reality of God as loving, creative, and light-filled, *near as my grandfather was to me.*

Our celebrations of Easter were an embodiment of nature's renewing of life and of sacred rituals. "Psyanky," Ukrainian Easter eggs designed with flowers, animals, and traditional images from his homeland of Ukraine were arranged in baskets near round loaves of Easter bread. Each design carried the message of renewed and risen life in Jesus, the triumph of good over evil through images resplendent with spring beauty that carried not only a familiarity but a kinship with my most immediate experience. Sheaves of pussy willows gathered near budded fruit branches greeted family and friends who participated in the Easter breakfast.

Even after his death in the summer of my fourth year, I never lost touch with the presence of Pa's love. During Holy Week of my eighth Easter, I remember one poignant moment filled with presence and new life. The mailman had brought a letter from Ukraine. Very carefully my mother opened the envelope taking out the small, square wafer blessed by the village priest from my grandfather's home in Western Ukraine. She told me the words read, "Jesus Christ is Risen." I felt the sacredness of Eucharist and the closeness of Pa. I opened my hands to receive the bread. □

Psalm 120

In my distress I cry to You,
that You may come quickly
to comfort me:
"Be strong in me, that I might
face the darkness,
the despair that rises up
from the depths."

I am bowed down with remorse:
for my inappropriate choices,
forgive me, O Healer.
For all my betrayals of others and
to my own soul,
forgive me, O Healer.
Bless my tears that flow like a
stream running to meet
the Living Waters of your Love.
Too long have I lived with guilt,
my shame blinding me to
your Love.
I yearn to live in peace; come quickly!
Strengthen me as I face
the darkness within!

From Psalms For Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness, *Copyright 1996 by Nan C. Merrill a frequent contributor to FiP and editor of "Friends of Silence" newsletter. Published by Continuum.*

Precipice

(The Edge)

ROCHELLE M. ROELOFS

Once again it seemed so close

The whirling in my head
The existentiality rushing to hem me in

No escape

The merging of what is
What could have been
It feels heavy . . .

I cling desperately
To the only meaning
That will save me

RIGHT NOW

A conscious willing
to focus every sense
on the immediate tangibleness

I see the teacup I am washing
I feel the shape and smooth surface
I inspect the intricate details
    of the Oriental design

Numbness to everything else, inside and out
My breathing is long and slow--and comforting

If I can maintain this heightened concentration
For a few more moments

I can little by little continue

I will be safe again, intact.

The Technique of Focused Attention

ROCHELLE M. ROELOFS

In times of anxiety and crisis, this author turns to a regular practice of focusing her attention to restore inner balance.

It feels as if I'm tied to a railroad track listening to the approaching speeding train, or I'm suspended in the funnel of a tornado, desperately reaching out for something to grab on to, but going nowhere fast.

At the time of my teacup incident, described in my poem, Precipice, on the preceding page, I was experiencing an anxiety attack when all the accumulated stresses of life seem to present themselves "en masse," in a joint attack, to my consciousness. This results for some individuals in obvious physical dysfunctions--muscle spasms, general bodily shaking, nausea and/or in my case, shallow breathing and frightening mental chaos.

What "saved" me was first an awareness that I was approaching the precipice, and then a conscious taking charge. No, there was no thinking, no in-depth rationalizing. From the confusion and inner turmoil, all that was possible was:

1. **Recognizing** my need to maintain balance

2. **Breathing** deeply and consciously

3. **Focusing** (internally and externally) on what is real

4. **Choosing to return** to my present situation

Rochelle M. Roelofs has been a student of metaphysics for twenty years and has explored several paths to spiritual growth. She enjoys snow shoeing, organic gardening, and living with her husband and two children in central rural Maine. She volunteers with hospice and with a local agency working with issues of aging.

Individuals with firsthand experience of anxiety attacks might agree that absolutely every ounce of one's willpower and energy needs to be directed toward maintaining equilibrium. My mind was quite blank; everyone and everything around me was deliberately shut out--a sort of energy conservation.

I consciously breathed deeper, in and out, perhaps counting with each inhalation and exhalation, with eyes closed. After several rounds in this manner, I opened my eyes and anchored myself to external reality with that teacup. Continuing the breathing, I allowed myself to notice every sensual aspect about the object: size, touch, color, and design.

By then, the internal whirling, both physical and emotional, had ceased. I slowly began to increase the range of my perception. My eyes registered the dishpan, the whole sink. I looked outside and saw my car in the driveway, the road and woods beyond. Still watching my breath, I began to be aware of sounds in the house--television, children talking.

An inner knowing began to gently take hold of my awareness. It was a sense that I had survived "another one." I gave myself permission to enjoy this realization. It meant success, a very private, yet very real and meaningful, achievement. This brought me to a last step:

5. **Giving myself credit**

We all need to pat ourselves on the backs, because we each have personal victories, however small and insignificant to others, that merit self-congratulation!

With creativity and imagination, the *Technique of Focused Attention* can be adapted to an infinite number of situations and needs: a student taking an exam, an unemployed person trying to decide which bills to pay, a traveler delayed in traffic, a patient in the dentist's office. The "precipice" for a parent might be an impending heated discussion with a teenager.

A business person feeling apprehensive during a meeting can operate on two channels, in a manner of speaking. Externally, co-workers will notice nothing unusual. However, there can be an awareness of deeper, deliberate breathing while listening to co-workers. Notes can be taken

in a more conscious manner, writing key words or thoughts neatly, carefully.

By quieting the rational mind and unpredictable emotions, the *Technique of Focused Attention* can lead to closer contact with our High Self.

This contact was especially important to me during a recent family crisis. During the long ride to Connecticut, and as we approached the home of my parents, I made frequent use of the technique. I remember asking my High Self to guide my words during the visit, to help me bring both Mom and Dad whatever they needed--encouragement, cheerfulness, or simply my presence and attention.

Continued financial difficulty, coupled with the normal challenges of motherhood and marriage can lead to mental turbulence and roller coaster emotions. So far, I have not turned to alcohol or drugs. I do not harm my children. My sanity can be attributed to a set of beliefs including the conviction that guidance is always available.

However, it is difficult for my soul, guides, and protecting angel to communicate anything through the static of uncontrolled thoughts and emotions. A few days ago, the following phrases came to mind during a discouraging review of our finances: mind control and soul awareness. The words presented themselves as the keys to give me direction and maintain my equilibrium. Somehow, these two things will help me go forward.

So simple, and so challenging to practice on a daily basis. To quote a friend, an amazing woman: "Giving up is not an option."

Mind control and soul awareness require a long-term commitment. Sincere determination and repeated effort may weaken under the stresses of today's world. Yet it is the inner world of our thoughts and emotions that can pose the greatest obstacle.

As a step in the right direction, I have been trying to develop the habit of frequent soul contact. Several times a day, I **recognize** the desire to link up with my soul. Depending on the need, I may or may not work on the conscious **breathing**. The **focusing** is often wordless, an internal glance which means: "I'm willing; you take the lead."

I believe that guidance is available. It's up to me to clear the inner static so that it can be accurately received.

Knowing that I have a tool such as the *Technique of Focused Attention* gives me hope and courage to continue with my life. This versatile gift can be modified to fit each individual's circumstances and needs.

I invite anyone seeking positive change in themselves and their lives to consider this method. It is passed along with thoughts of perseverance and success. □

Therese of Lisieux: A Saint and Teacher For Our Time

JOSEPH F. SCHMIDT, FSC

Shortly before her death in 1897, Therese of Lisieux said, "I feel that my mission is about to begin, my mission to make God loved as I love Him, to teach souls my little way." Here, this writer highlights four "awarenesses" from Therese's writings which have helped countless people of faith to see God in the little things of life.

About forty years ago I came upon a biography of Therese Martin, or Therese of Lisieux, the Little Flower, as she is commonly and affectionately known in Catholic circles. I had years earlier read Therese's autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*, but then I had been too young to appreciate her spirituality. This time, having lived through much inner unrest, and understanding more deeply the futility of willfulness and the snares of self-deceit on the spiritual path, I recognized in Therese a unique and unexcelled teacher of spirituality.

Since she died at the age of twenty-four and since her spirituality is based on simplicity and spiritual childhood, it has been fashionable to presume that young people might find her "little way" of holiness to be attractive. But Therese was so spiritually precocious that young people often miss her depth. Indeed, some of the childhood contents of the early chapters of her autobiography seem to be just childish stories.

Brother Joseph Schmidt, a member of the DeLaSalle Christian Brothers, is a retreat director, pastoral counselor, and staff member of Sangre De Cristo Center, a sabbatical center in New Mexico. He is author of Praying Our Experiences *and* Praying With Therese of Lisieux.

Also, she wrote in a 19th century French provincial style, and with only a few years of formal education. But relentlessly flowing through the sometimes sentimental presentation is Therese's clear spiritual awareness which has made her story a Christian classic, translated into many languages and admired by millions of ordinary people.

Therese's influence has touched a wide spectrum of seekers of enlightenment and holiness, from east to west. She is respected by Buddhists and Catholics, Christians of the Orthodox tradition, Protestants, and non-denominational seekers of truth. She has influenced such diverse writers and activists as George Bernanos, Thomas Merton, Scott Peck, Gustavo Gutierrez, and Dorothy Day. The Catholic Worker movement is under her patronage, and Merton often introduced Therese to his novices. She has been praised by some of the most demanding theologians and spiritual leaders of our time.

Therese lived in a Carmelite monastery for nine years, from the time she was fifteen until her death at twenty-four; she died of tuberculosis after eighteen months of severe pain. During those years of focused attention, prayer, solitude, disciplined monastic lifestyle, and suffering, she was gifted with an enlightenment that she herself recognized as being of transformational value not only for herself but for others. She was certain that her "little way" would be of help to ordinary people longing for God.

Therese wrote her autobiography at the request of her blood sister, who was also a Carmelite nun, and a prioress of her monastery. Her writings include two volumes of letters and a volume of poetry, which have never been translated into English. Therese had no spiritual director herself; her spiritual education came, as she herself was to say, from Jesus.

Therese's spiritual way includes many elements, among which are four awarenesses, which she lived with clarity and integrity:

1. Spiritually we are always children incapable of contribution to our holiness and enlightenment except by trusting and accepting God's mystery in the ordinary experiences of life. All of our experiences

are graces, even the most difficult ones. "All is a grace," was one of Therese's mantras.

2. We are to cultivate self-knowledge, self-respect, and to trust that God is working in each of our experiences. As God's children we have an integrity that does not permit violence toward ourselves, but fosters an inner freedom that can overcome our negative feelings.

3. Our relationships with others are most fruitfully characterized by a compassion which is neither sentimental nor patronizing, that flows from personal inner freedom. This compassion moves us to creatively accommodate and care for others in ways that do not personally compromise us.

4. Our relationship with nature is most fruitfully characterized by a sense of awe and gratefulness; we are students of nature, not the destroyers.

Therese's "little way" is the spiritual path of trusting that God is always leading us, even through the smallest things of life. It is especially in these little things that our constant attention needs to be focused on receiving God's love and responding with integrity, creativity, and inner freedom.

Since Therese's death in 1897, her message has become even more important. This is a century of personal compromise, nature-destroying consumerism, and unbelievable violence. Many people fail to trust their deepest intuitions, and turn to addictive behaviors that eliminate inner freedom. It is a time when trust in God is regarded as being naive, when an uncaring or patronizing attitude replaces compassion, and when accommodating others is seen as "wimpish."

For forty years I have been a student of Therese. In many ways, her teaching carries the content of what Christians call the "Good News" with more clarity than do the gospel stories themselves. This truth shocked me

Janet Gnall

until I understood that the gift of holy people is to manifest and proclaim the Good News in ways that clearly challenge and call each generation.

In the Catholic tradition, the way one learns goodness, the way one comes to practice true virtue, the way one is moved to live holiness is by associating with good, virtuous, and holy persons. Therese is one such person and according to the late Pope Pius X, "the greatest saint of modern times." At this time of the hundredth anniversary of her death, she is seriously being considered by the Catholic Church to be proclaimed a Doctor of the Church. If this should happen, Therese would be only the third woman in the history of the Church to be so revered. □

Robert F. Campbell

Loving Provider of Pine Cones

SISTER SELENA, O.C.D.

This prayer poem was written by a sister inspired by the writings of Therese of Lisieux.

> I felt it was far more valuable to speak
> to God than to speak about God.
> *Therese of Lisieux, Story of a Soul*

To begin anew in this moment
to turn again to You
who ingeniously created the evergreens
diluting the starkness of winter's transitional nakedness,
making evident Your Mystery.

How obvious Your omniscience
in the symmetrical configurations of pine needle families.
Separate
yet melded harmoniously
as is Your desire for all creation
unity
harmony
mutuality
all communally striving to live out Your message of universal love.

May Your will be done,
Loving Provider of Pines Cones and all . . .

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The Power of Symbol

ELIZABETH M. MALONEY

A move to a new church leads this writer to struggle to find a place of ministry and a sense of belonging. As she joins in weekly worship, she discovers what binds us together. Please send the story of your own "transforming experience" to the Editor, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542. You need not be a professional writer.

I sat in the pew this particular morning waiting for the liturgy to begin and still musing over a line by Richard Rohr read to me earlier in the day by my husband, seated beside me. "Holiness comes from what you allow to be done to you by the circumstances of life, by the people who are right there in front of you. We don't convert ourselves; we are converted."

We moved to this quaint and idyllic town of 2300 people over three years ago. We had moved from a church in the Midwest where I had been deeply involved in local ministries. I loved it there; I loved the openness I experienced in the people, the parish community, and the diocese; and I loved the fine liturgy I found all around me. I was nourished there in my faith and I grew.

Through a series of circumstances, the end of one job and the resurrection to another, we moved to an area with a church of similar

Elizabeth M. Maloney, mother of four grown children, has been active in various areas of ministry for most of her adult life. She and her husband have moved to eight different communities in thirty years of marriage.

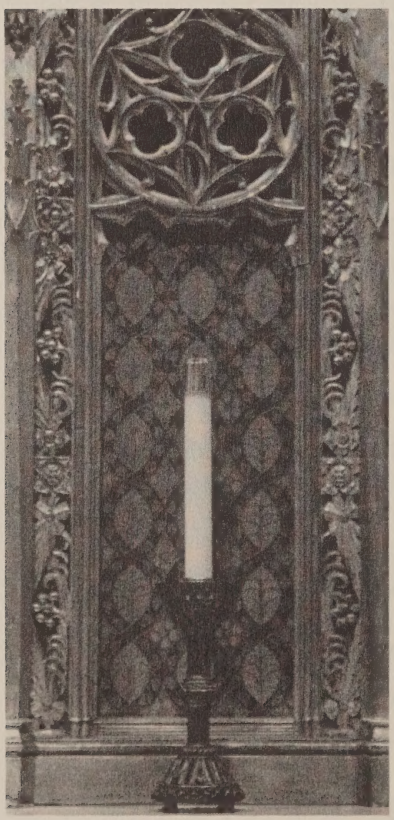
size, in a much more traditional--one could say, conservative--part of the country. I was stunned. I struggled. For two years I struggled. No one seemed to know where I was coming from; no one seemed to look at the life of the community or the liturgy with the same eyes that I did. It became increasingly difficult not to become judgmental of what and who I found here. I was not accustomed to the very traditional life I found here. I facilitated a centering prayer workshop for a group and was immediately asked if I had formerly been a nun! No one seemed to know that I, a lay woman, was one of those "people of God" that was the church. My husband understood and supported me with great love and compassion, but he was busy with his new job. My pastor, I felt, understood, but he had a very traditional group he did not want to alienate. I eventually found a spiritual director/companion a two-hour drive away, and she understood, but still I struggled. If only on Sunday, one, at least one, of the hymns would be something written in the twentieth century! Eventually I became involved in the Liturgy Committee and in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (This is the process through which adults now "grow" into becoming members of the Catholic Church). Still, though, there remained a hunger, a void, a darkness. I wanted to make this transition; I wanted to move forward--but somehow, I could not.

I listened this morning while our pastor spoke in his homily of compassion and then I heard him talk about the Christian life being a series of doors that open to us . . . when we walk through one we soon find another that needs to be opened to an even larger room. How true, I thought. But how do I *really* open that door?

What happened next, I am not sure. It was time for communion and people were coming forward as we began to sing, "Make me a channel of your peace . . . Where there is hatred let me sow love . . ." Those words grabbed me in a way I don't remember before. A young white boy pushed a wheelchair forward; his companion was a young black teen, seemingly a victim of muscular dystrophy, or something similar. I fought back the tears. And our pastor, in his deep and resonant voice as he gave Communion to those standing before him said, "The Body of Christ." And then to the young father carrying a small child, whom he

blessed, he said, "The Body of Christ."

As my husband and I walked from our pew to receive, now to the choirs' strains of "Pia Jesu," I kept hearing it, "The Body of Christ, The Body of Christ, The Body of Christ." And the tears would not leave. As I received and then drank from the cup, returned to my pew, and half knelt in the old and tight pew, the tears came again. "My God," I said in my heart, "we *are* the Body of Christ." That elderly lady, the baby in arms, the young father, the young white boy and his black and disabled friend . . . *all* of us; we are the Body of Christ. It matters not if we are young or old, white or black, traditional, conservative, liberal, or whatever, *we are all* the Body of Christ. The young mother of three I served at the food bank last week, the disabled black teen at this weekend's liturgy, the very conservative gray-haired grandmother, my progressive liturgist friend in the Midwest, and even me, as I struggled in a new and narrower environment, are all the Body of Christ. Holiness is not what I pray; it is not whether I use inclusive language, it is not what I sing. Holiness is not what I do. It *is* what I allow that black teen, that gray-haired grandmother, that child in arms, that young mother of three--the Body of Christ--to do to me. "We don't convert ourselves; we are converted." □



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